

Westmont College The Horizon Voice

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Lessons on reconciliation: A pair of shoes, racism and white guilt

tuesalldax

Today I threw a pair of shoes away; cute ones with light blue ties over the toes. A month ago I would have never thrown them out, but I have changed.

The beginning of this semester I went with four other (amazing by the way) students, and two faculty: Elena Yee and Angie Gonzalez, to Biola for a Racial Reconciliation Conference.

I have to say that out of the 75 or so people that attended only about 10 were white; I also have to say that race matters, in America, today, at Westmont, it matters.

The conference started with a one-woman performance. She acted out the life of a young Native American high school student who fought against her school's decision to name its mascot "The Chiefs." She explained that the use of her people as mascots is degrading and makes the Native American people feel subhuman and nonexistent.

The most powerful moment for me was when she held up signs with cartoons of offensive stereotypical depictions of races to ask us how we would feel if our identity was illustrated in this manner.

First we saw a cartoon labeled the "California Caucasians," a man with a cowboy hat and overalls and a piece of wheat hanging dumbly from his mouth; the "New York Blacks" with an afro and thick lips that spanned over half of his face, and

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wide nose; the "San Francisco Asians" with slanted eyes and a kimono.

Then she held up the real picture of the mascot for the "Atlanta Braves," an Indian man with a silly wide grin and feather sticking from his head. It was horrible.

She then talked about the "Jeep Grand Cherokees", a car named after a Native American holy leader. She said it would be like naming it the "Jeep Jewish Rabi" or the "Jeep Jesus Crucified." It made me wonder what other offensive labels there are in this world that I have failed to see.

During the second day of the conference I began to get tired of all this talk of race. I wanted to go back to Westmont where I could pretend the problem of racism does not exist.

But the talk of race continued; I heard Asian and African American students explain that white people made fun of them growing up; this made me feel uncomfortable so I suggested we talk about something else, like the movies. They explained how movies and television do not have enough people of different ethnicities, and how the media and magazines still display white as the ideal beauty.

This is when I started to get really frustrated; wasn't there any topics we could discuss that did not deal with race?

How about Christianity? Let's talk about how the Church is uniting, but they say look at the congregations that are still separated by race; come on, I think, the Church is not that bad - we accept people of different ethnicities. I visualize my church at home: everyone upper class and white.

Oh, I think, oh - maybe we don't like people who are different.

But if I begin to agree - to realize that I have given in to the lies of my culture, the lies of America, the lies of our history, then what? I see myself for what I am - a racist;

and with that I feel guilt, hoards of it
splashing over me.

This is when I heard Doug Schaupp speak
on White Guilt in a Multiethnic World. He
explained that worldly grief leads to death
and that our guilt will destroy us. White
people cannot feel bad when race issues
come up, because they need to
acknowledge their sinful nature. They need
to say to themselves: "yes, I am self
justified and will use racism, or anything to
make myself feel better; I am sorry please
forgive me," and there is freedom.

Schaupp said if you sit on white guilt then
you will not be a part of the solution, you
will be useless, instead we all need to be
liberated.

This brings me full circle to my first
comment about my shoes. Today I put
them in the garbage because I noticed that
the brand name was "Cherokee." Instead of
feeling guilty, today I asked God to forgive
me. I threw them away, and I will continue
to toss the oppressive products of our sinful
humanity, because that is where they
belong - in the trash with the rest of the
world's decaying waste.

-Sarah Shoemaker ☐